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Professional Golf: A License to Spend Money?

Issues of Money in the Lives of Touring Professional Golfers

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Abstract

Drawing upon figural sociology, this paper examines issues of money that are central to touring professional golfers' workplace experiences. Based on interviews with 16 professionals, results indicate the monetary rewards available for top golfers continues to increase, however, such recompense is available to relatively small numbers and the majority fare poorly. Results suggest that playing on tour with other like-minded golfers fosters internalized constraints relating to behaviour, referred to as 'habitus', whereby many players 'gamble' on pursuing golf as their main source of income despite the odds against them. Golfers are constrained to develop networks with sponsors for financial reasons which has left some players with conflicting choices between regular money, and adhering to restrictive contractual agreements, or the freedom to choose between different brands.

Key words: professional golf, money, career incomes, labour markets, globalization, figural sociology

Historically, being a “professional” sports person and playing for money was associated with manual labour and the working classes (Dunning & Sheard, 2005), however, following the de-amateurization and commercialization of some popular sports, such as Association football and golf, a change in reward structure over the past 50 years has impacted upon career earnings to a level commensurate with the standards of income traditionally associated with the middle- and upper-classes of society (Cashmore & Parker, 2003; Gratton & Taylor, 2000; Szymanski & Kuypers, 1999; Wacquant, 2011). The commercialization of several sports, including golf, which has increased as a result of the development of sports sponsorship and the rapidly increasing global television audience for live and recorded sport, has resulted in huge increases in the financial rewards available to some successful sportspeople (Murphy & Waddington, 2007). Over the past 20 years, for example, basketball player Michael Jordan and golfer Tiger Woods have dominated the Forbes magazine list of the world’s best paid athletes. In 1995, Jordan’s salary from the Chicago Bulls was \$3.9 million, but this was dwarfed by his earnings from product endorsement, estimated to have been in the region of \$40 million (Armstrong, 1996). Similarly, when Tiger Woods turned professional in 1996 he won two United States Professional Golf Association (USPGA) tournaments within seven weeks and after only four months of competition he ranked 24th on the overall annual money list with \$800,000 in earnings. By the end of Woods’s first year on tour his on-course earnings and off-course sponsorship were estimated at over \$26 million (Farrell, Karels, Montfort, & McClatchey, 2000). Furthermore, leading footballers in the English Premier League can receive salaries in excess of £100,000 per week in addition to substantial earnings from advertising and product endorsement (Naouali, Ati, & Sobry,

2011). Given the large rewards available and the celebrity lifestyles associated with high-profile success, it is unsurprising that a career in elite level sport is considered an attractive proposition for many. However, despite the millionaire stereotype, the reality is that enormous rewards in professional sport are available to a significant minority of competitors and the vast majority fare comparatively poorly (Frank & Cook, 2010; Giulianotti, 1999; Murphy & Waddington, 2007; Szymanski & Kuypers, 1999). However, research examining the lifestyles of elite, professional sportspeople and their attitudes to their “work” is extremely limited (Roderick, 2012a). In particular, as far as can be reasonably ascertained, there is no academic literature concerning the workplace experiences of male professional golfers, though Douglas and colleagues have examined female golfers’ careers from a psychological perspective (Douglas & Carless, 2008; Douglas & Carless, 2006). The central objective of this paper, therefore, is to examine issues of money in the lives of professional golfers across the three tiers of the European Professional Golf Association (EPGA) tour (see figure 1). More specifically, this includes a focus on the ways and extent to which issues of money shape the lives of the majority of players and the increasingly complex networks of relationships which accompany this. In so doing we hope to more adequately provide answers to our research question: how has money impacted on the development of relationships in the working lives of male professional golfers?

In brief, it is argued that golfers in the higher echelons of the professional game are receiving more money than ever before, both in terms of prize money and available endorsements, however, such recompense is available to relatively small numbers. A

closer examination of the network in which players are inescapably involved indicates that the prize breakdown and costs of playing on tour fosters, both subconsciously and consciously, internalized constraints relating to behaviour whereby many golfers 'gamble' on pursuing golf as their main source of income even despite the small chance of making a living out of the game. This 'habitus' is contoured by others in the golf figuration as professional golfers inevitably struggle to view their social world in a more detached and more reality-congruent way. In order to pursue their dreams many golfers develop networks with sponsors for financial reasons, however, this leaves some players with conflicting choices between regular money from equipment sponsors, and adhering to restrictive contractual agreements, or the freedom to choose and play with a variety of different brand clubs. This research not only highlights the workplace pressures of professional golf but offers a preliminary framework in which to make more sense of the relationship between work, money, and significant others in a variety of highly skilled occupations with similar non-settler transient migratory patterns, including tennis and athletics, in addition to careers more generally such as touring musicians, motivational speakers and other business elites. Within this paper we will firstly examine the limited, existing literature on the workplace of professional sportspeople, then we will present our methods and theoretical position, before a discussion of our results.

Sport Work Literature: Issues of Money in the Lives of Professional Sportspeople

Despite the common sense perceptions of the lifestyles and monetary rewards associated with being a professional sportsperson, which are often the central focus of the media, there is general agreement within the academic literature that making a living

from professional sport is unrealistic for most people. In 1988, Leonard-Ii and Reyman conducted a statistical analysis of entrants into professional sport achieving upward social mobility and making a living. Results indicated that the professional sports opportunity structure is “severely restricted and the odds of attaining a professional sport career are slim” (Leonard-Ii and Reyman, 1988, p.165). More recently, Wacquant (2011) suggests that given the million-dollar prize-money which features heavily in media stories on high-profile, but highly atypical, heavyweight title fights, most people are likely to believe that all boxers collect large purses when in fact the vast majority are barely earning a few hundred dollars for weeks of laborious, intensive preparation. Professional boxers have traditionally entered the sport to achieve material success and economic improvement (Weinberg & Arond, 1952). As Wacquant (1995, p.326) argues, the “statistically improbable hope of astronomical ‘paydays’ that will allow you to buy a house, retire, and provide for kin and kids are prominently featured in the vocabularies of motives”. The reality, it seems, is that professional boxing provides not so much an opportunity for economic betterment *per se* but rather the promise of what could loosely be defined as ‘a better life’, for boxers and their families (Hare, 1971). Similarly, in his work on professional football, which is often glamorized as a high earning profession, Roderick (2006) argues that the inherent uncertainty, short term nature, and overall insecurity of the sport as work means issues of money feature heavily in players’ workplace experiences. Roderick (2006, p.253) provides a typical quote from a professional regarding the short term nature of contracts, who said “oh God, it frightens me to death, you know, my contract running out at the end of the season. It’s coming too quick ... I’ve got to be able to pay the mortgage”.

It is clear that issues of money are central to the lives of the majority of sportspeople. Where academic papers differ, however, is in explaining earning potential. For example, some studies argue that sportspeople have their destiny in their own hands and that earning potential is a product of individual sporting performance. In professional football, Frick (2007, p.442) draws on a number of quantifiable “performance measures” as the major determinants of player salaries, including: age and number of career games, number of goal assists and tackles won, the number of international caps and European level games, and the number of goals scored in previous seasons. This argument is extended to account for some more subjective measures including the ability of individuals to be multi-positional and players who can control the ball with both feet have a premium added to their salary (Frick, 2007). However, such viewpoints are limited given the narrow quantitative approach adopted which tends to plot data over a snapshot during just one season on a small number of individual performance measures and fails to account for the wider network which sportspeople are inescapably involved. This said, some academic papers of a quantitative nature attempt to draw on wider factors which do not occur in the sports arena itself. By referring to the “superstar effect”, Lucifora and Simons (2003, p.51) equate the number of Google hits as a measure of a player’s popularity in relation to their wage income. It is unsurprising that quantitative statistical analysis of this kind in professional sport are more commonplace, given the access issues associated with professional sportspeople, however, a solely quantitative approach fails to account for individual experiences and explanations which are central to this study on professional golfers.

Rather than offer a “snap shot” in time, often provided by quantitative approaches, a longer-term developmental approach should be adopted, where possible, when assessing the career, and income, trajectories of professional sportspeople. McGovern (2002) has outlined a hierarchy based ‘job ladder’ of professional sport consisting of entry at the bottom and upwards movement linked to the progressive development of skills, experience, and knowledge. Entry and retention at or near the top rung of the sport job ladder are unusual, but does happen on occasions. The evidence suggests that despite some superficial similarities with traditional white collar jobs that the sport job ladder does not reflect the ‘normal’ career progression experienced by the majority (Roderick, 2006). Sport careers develop in a rather more unplanned or disorderly manner and thus the chances of making money are both difficult and extremely unevenly distributed from the start (Roderick, 2006; Wacquant, 2007). Similarly, Rosen and Sanderson (2001) analyse the developmental trajectories of professional sportspeople and conclude that sport, in common with other forms of entertainment professions such as musicians, is a high risk career and most attempts to break into the top echelons result in failure. Large financial risks are inevitable given the small number of top players, which is further compounded given that career lengths in sport are often short in duration.

Even despite the critical appraisal of career prospects in professional sport, Rosen and Sanderson (2001) adopt a rather ideological position regarding the decisions which accompany this. They argue that the uncertainty and high risk of failure in professional

sports does not mean entrants are “giddy risk lovers with unrealistic assessments of themselves” but rather make “informed decisions about their prospects in sport” (Rosen & Sanderson, 2001, p.60). For Rosen and Sanderson (2001, p.60) the continual feedback on past performances which sportspeople receive is offered as an opportunity to reassess their chances and “when the record gets sufficiently unfavourable, they quit and do something else”. Roderick (2006) notes that entrants to professional football soon become acutely aware of the uncertainty in the market – such as limited duration of contracts, competition for places, excessive supply of labour, and vulnerability to aging – and the impacts of this on their income, however, he also states that decisions are rarely made in isolation. Whilst Rosen and Sanderson (2001) recognize that aspiring sportspeople invest much time and money into pursuing a sport career, they pay insufficient attention in their analyses to the impacts this may have in clouding the decisions of sportspeople regarding career chances. Aspiring sportspeople are often overly involved and may therefore fail to view the reality of their situation in a sufficiently detached manner given the emotions and competing information from others in their wider network – including family, friends, and the lure of media accounts of top level sport – which contours decisions of this kind (Roderick, 2006). It is, of course, perfectly understandable that aspiring sportspeople will be so involved, and it is a key aspect of this paper to offer the more detached, social scientists’ view of the figurations in which professional golfers find themselves working in and around.

Roderick (2006) argues that the career paths of professional footballers, and thus the monetary rewards they receive, do not solely rest on the sporting performance or

choices of individual players but rather the result of a number of unintended consequences over a player's entire career. A young footballer at the outset of their career may think that their destiny is in their own hands, however, as they develop as a player they find themselves "increasingly caught up in ties of interdependence which they cannot comprehend very easily if at all" (Roderick 2006, p.4). Roderick (2006) is referring to a process whereby sportspeople often refer to their current career and financial situation as 'bad luck' and only later come to realize that it is the result of the intended and unintended outcomes that arise out of the relationships they have with, and figurations formed by, all people in their workplace network. In a similar vein, Wacquant (1998, 2001) argues that however much boxers believe the ring and gym is their place of work and where they make their living, they cannot ignore that the complex system of patronage and sponsorship that surrounds the ring contributes to what happens in it. Also in boxing, Weinberg and Arond (1952) argued over 50 years ago that even then trainers, managers and promoters viewed boxing in different ways from the boxers themselves and frequently this affected their careers. It seems reasonably clear that professional boxers and footballers are embroiled in a complex network of interdependencies which contour the experience of economic issues in the sport workplace over the long term.

There is no academic literature addressing the workplace experiences of male professional golfers, however, golf does attract media attention more generally. For example, Biddiscombe (2008, 2009) and Feinstein (2008) offer interesting accounts of the experiences of golfers entering qualifying school for the EPGA and USPGA Tours respectively. Such accounts, interesting though they are in addressing the fine margins

between qualifying for the golf tours, and thus ultimately enabling golfers to play for prize money, are somewhat descriptive and chart players experiences as “individual case studies”. Rather than view players in isolation, this paper aims to capture the complex relational network in which they are inescapably enmeshed, and the extent to which they are enabled and constrained by the power struggles which characterize such relationships. The particular importance figurational sociologists place on trying to more adequately understand the constraining and enabling features of the network of relations in which individual golfers find themselves is of concern within our paper. As Elias (1991, p. 24) points out “it is easy to lose sight of the fundamental importance of the relations between people for the individual in their midst”. Of course, much of the network is not even ‘known’, in the strictest sense, to the golfers themselves, or even us as more detached observers of our participants. Nonetheless, it is important to conceive of the individual golfers in our study as necessarily being impacted on by, and impacting on others within, a wider network of relations.

Undoubtedly a key reason behind the relatively sparse amount of academic literature in the field of professional sportspeople is that many are public figures who acquire varying degrees of celebrity status and they do not willingly or easily grant permission for “unknowns” to interview them for extended periods. As such, qualitative data of this type is rare in golf and academic research into elite sport generally. The research presented here on the lives of professional golfers, however, offers the views of one such hard to reach population. Professional golfers are mostly interviewed by journalists, therefore, as with other celebrities, they mostly confine themselves to

prepared sound bites and generalized comments. They rarely, if ever, grant interviews in which they respond openly to searching questions for a prolonged period. The lead researcher in this study is based at the International Institute for Golf Education (IIGE), which helped ensure access to an existing and established network of player managers who represent golf professionals suitable for interviewing purposes. Professional golfers who already had links with IIGE were contacted, whereupon the nature of the research was explained to them, and, if they were willing, they were recruited for interview. Some of the participants in this research developed via a snowball sample from these initial contacts. However, prior to any analysis of this material it is necessary to establish the methods used to gather the appropriate primary data in order to justify a suitable academic foundation for its evaluation and then to more adequately answer the key research question under scrutiny here: how has money impacted on the development of relationships in the working lives of male professional golfers?

Method

The primary data informing the discursive analysis in this argument is taken from a set of semi-structured interviews with 16 British male professional golfers. Players were aged between 22 and 56 and selected on their ability to provide an insight of tournament golf across the three tiers of the EPGA tour. Each player has taken a unique and often complex route to their current position and virtually all players have experience of playing more than one tour (see table 1 for detailed career trajectories). This sampling strategy ensured that a cross section of players representing all three tiers of the EPGA tour were selected for interview, and also allowed us to probe processual issues regarding

changes over their career trajectories, and the impact that changes on the structure of the tours has had on their professional lives. Interviews were conducted between May and December 2012, lasted approximately 45 minutes, and took place in a private area of a golf club selected by each participant. Interviews were recorded and participants told that they could stop the interview at any time, for any reason. Participants were given a guarantee that all data will remain confidential. As a result the pseudonyms “golfer A, B, C etc.” were used for each player and identifiable material such as exact years on respective tours have been removed.

Interviews were used in order to attempt to “generate data which gives authentic insights into peoples’ experiences” (Miller & Glassner, 2001, p.126). In this case, semi-structured interviews were adopted primarily so interviewees could elaborate without the rigidity of structured interviewing. This methodology allowed us to investigate the ways in which professional golfers viewed their social world (Bryman, 2012). Each interview was designed to encourage players to discuss their views about the reality of their work as a professional golfer and how this has changed over time. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, common themes identified, and analysed from a figurational sociological standpoint. The Nvivo computer package was utilized to code interview transcripts and organize themes. Coding was carried out by the lead author but there was continual debate with the co-authors during this process, which helped to encourage a greater degree of detachment from the data (Perry et al., 2004) and provided us with additional scrutiny in the development of codes (Mennell, 1992). Figurational sociological concepts were used to sensitize the researcher – namely figurations, power

relations, habitus, and unplanned processes. In this respect, a process of two-way traffic was sought between testing existing explanations and generating new ideas directly from collated data (Elias, 1978).

A figurational approach aims to avoid absolutist, mono-causal, unidirectional explanations such as those often focussed upon by the media. Instead, focus is placed on the wider network in which players are inescapably enmeshed. Through the network of relationships individuals find themselves inevitably involved with, they develop, subconsciously and consciously, internalized constraints relating to behaviour. This is referred to as an individual's 'habitus', and we hope to demonstrate that this concept provides a sophisticated analytical tool for examining how golfers make sense of their working lives. The very complexity and dynamic nature of people in figurations, particularly over time, often give rise to outcomes that no individual chooses or deliberately designs. Elias (1987, p.99) described these outcomes as "blind social processes" and stressed that they were normal aspects of everyday social interactions. This paper will focus upon the intentional and unintentional, unplanned aspects of human figurations, the composition of which will vary over time. For example, interviewees were encouraged to talk about changes during their time as a professional golfer and reflect on transitions during their careers. No single causal factor predominates, rather processes are the result of a complex interweaving of intended and unintended sets of actions of groups of people. At the core of changing figurations, indeed the very centre of a figurational approach, is a fluctuating, tensile equilibrium, a balance of power moving to and fro, from one individual and then to another, some quick and ephemeral, others

slower but perhaps more lasting (Mennell, 1992). This type of fluctuating balance of power is a structural characteristic of every figuration and it also highlights the constraining and enabling nature of human relations in line with the fluctuating and dynamic distribution of power. Even those perceived as the most powerful individuals and groups, such as professional golfers in this case, are constrained by the varying networks of relationships they are involved in. Power, therefore, is viewed in relational terms. Any individual's power is enabled and constrained by the relational network of which they are themselves a part. Having outlined a brief overview of the figural approach, it is our intention to now explore the ways in which this helped us make sense of the data. The main themes that emerged from the analysis of our data included the fluctuating dynamics of prize breakdown and the practical costs of playing on tour; making a living as a touring professional golfer; a golfer's habitus and hoping for the big break; and the enabling and constraining roles of a sponsor.

The “Reality” of Money in Professional Golf: The Fluctuating Dynamics of Prize Breakdown versus Practical Costs of Playing on Tour

Firstly, in order to frame an argument primarily concerned with the social outcomes engendered by the economic forces dominating elite sport, it is necessary to contextualize the amount of prize money available on the EPGA tour. Indeed there has been a significant increase in prize money available which is evidenced by the EPGA tour order of merit winners. When the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) organized the first EPGA tour season in 1971 the leading player, England's Peter Oosterhuis, earned, in real value, £127,092². In 1984, when the tour became independent of the PGA,

Bernhard Langer was top of the order of merit with £414,960. 10 years later in 1994 Colin Montgomery was the year's largest earner with £1,372,916. By 2004 this amount was nearly three times higher when Ernie Els won £3,504,579 and at the end of the 2012 season Rory McIlroy won the order of merit with £4,432,679 (EPGA, 2012a). For the very best players there are also large sums of money available in terms of sponsorship and appearance money. At EPGA tournaments the organizers offer player lounges with free food and drink all day, in addition to gifts including consumer durables, tickets for professional sporting events, and in some cases chartered shopping trips for players' wives. Given the wealth and glamour associated with the elite professional game it is not surprising that many young golfers aspire to play golf for their living. With that in mind, and as outlined earlier, this paper seeks to provide a more realistic analysis of the financial aspects of the lives of professional golfers as their careers move across all three tiers of the EPGA Tour and the increasingly complex networks of relationships, constraints and decisions which accompany this.

Most professional golf events last four days in total and after the first two days there is a halfway "cut". The cut is generally the top 65 plus ties out of a maximum field of 157³. If a player makes the cut they will compete for a sliding scale of prize money that increases exponentially the higher they finish. In contrast to sports like football – where a player will still earn a basic wage even if they do not play a particular game – if a golfer does not make the cut they earn zero prize money for that event. There are a number of differential outcomes regarding monetary rewards for players from competing in a golf tournament. From players finding themselves in a position where they pay their

own money to travel and stay at a venue, and if they do not make the cut they will lose money, through to making the cut and, dependent on their position in the field, earning enough to cover expenses, through to potentially winning large amounts of money. Given the variety of different outcomes perhaps unsurprisingly there was near universal acceptance among all players interviewed that making the cut is a key milestone in the week of a professional golfer. As Golfer A, an EPGA tour player for 16 years, explained “making the cut is always a big thing on regular tour events, my main goal is firstly to make the cut which will then let you try and make your pay cheque”. Similarly, Golfer O, an EPGA tour player, said “that putt to make the cut can be difficult ... a putt to make sure you can earn some money during the weekend”. Whether a player makes any profit over the course of a season depends largely upon their ability to earn more in prize money than they outlay in travel expenses.

Extensive travel remains a crucial aspect of any professional golfer’s career. Indeed, Maguire (1999) has referred to professional golfers as the “nomads” of the sports labour migration process. Arguably, it is the cost of travel that is the largest outlay for the vast majority and the cost of travelling to events on the EPGA tour has become increasingly expensive over the period of time in which many of the participants in this study have been involved. An aspect of the professional golfer’s life largely out of their hands is the location of EPGA tournaments. In 1992, six of a total 41 tournaments were staged outside Europe and by 2002 this was 16 from 41. By 2012, more than half of the EPGA tour itinerary was staged outside of Europe, and included events in the USA, South Africa, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, India, Morocco, Malaysia, China, Hong

Kong, South Korea, and Australia (EPGA, 2012b). The remaining events that are staged within Europe still incur significant travel expenses. A professional based in England, for example, would be obliged to travel overseas to play throughout the majority of the year. For example, only five events from 43 on the 2012 schedule were staged in England, Scotland, or Wales. Furthermore, two of these events – The BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth and The Open Championship at Royal Lytham and St Annes – were not open to the EPGA tour players unless they were in the world's top 50 or qualified through specific events. Reflecting on an increasingly global schedule of events, Golfer C, a long term EPGA tour player, said “be aware of all the downfalls of travelling, it's very different now [compared to when I first started on tour] ... the life of a tour pro is a tough one. Underestimatedly [sic] tough”. This paper will address some of what Golfer C described as ‘downfalls’ of travelling by specifically analysing pay and conditions in professional golf. Given the amount of prize-money required simply to cover travelling expenses, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that a central concern for the participants in this study was the level they had to reach in order to make a living out of the game.

Making a Living as a Touring Professional Golfer

The general consensus amongst interviewees was that players who automatically retain their card on the EPGA tour, which is achieved by finishing within the top 115 on the order of merit at the end of the season, would make a significant profit. For example, the player ranked 115th at the end of the 2012 season earned £155,276. As the players interviewed for this study identified typical annual expenses of between £60,000 and £100,000 on travel, accommodation, caddy fees, management fees, tax and other

associated costs, this would suggest that a player finishing within the top 115 was likely to be making a significant profit. This “profit” would only account for one season, however, and a player would need to produce a level of consistency over a number of years to make a comfortable living from golf. As Golfer J, who has played on the EPGA tour for the last five years, explained: “If you stay on tour for a few years you can do very well for yourself ... It’s a good life ... there are times where your bank account is just rolling away!” However, he also acknowledged that “it’s tough at times and you’re going to have peaks and troughs. There are times when it’s a bit shitty and a bit of a grind”. As this quote alludes, professional golfers on the EPGA tour can earn large sums of money, however, this financial potential does not represent a linear progression and instead develops in an unplanned or disorderly manner, unevenly distributed from the start. The uneven earning potential in golf is similar to boxing (Wacquant, 2007) and football (Roderick, 2006) and differs to many “mainstream” occupations (Roderick, 2012a). This said, the participants in this study considered that maintaining their card on the EPGA tour is a key milestone to enable them to compete for the larger prize purses. However, only 115 players can maintain their tour card status in any one year and in 2012 there were over 300 players who played on the EPGA tour and hundreds more playing its second and third tiers, and thousands more playing on local satellite tours. Roderick (2012b) argues that in professional football elite level players have been able to secure themselves financially, however, below the very top level players are subject to numerous employment and material uncertainties. A similarly more detached critical observation in professional golf indicates that the monetary rewards available are by no means disseminated very far down the golf hierarchy. The reality is that many individuals are

playing at a loss in pursuit of the ‘dream’; that is, just getting onto the EPGA tour, never mind winning tournaments on it. Golfer K, who has played EPGA and Challenge tour golf for 12 years stated, “for every Monty, Ernie or Poulter there are 100 other players who are risking everything to live the dream on the European Tour. They don’t have six figure bank accounts and huge sponsorship deals. They don’t fly in private jets and drive round in Ferraris”. This quote highlights the differential power relationships which contour the lives of professional golfers. Professional golfers therefore cannot be viewed as a homogenous group as many players are struggling financially and yet they still have to ply their trade in an environment that requires considerable outlay.

The EPGA tour’s second tier, the Challenge tour, has also become increasingly global. Whereas in 2002 only two events were held outside the European Union, by the 2012 season events were staged in Columbia, Kenya, Russia, Kazakhstan, and India. However, the prize money is much lower than on the main tour. This means travel expenses are comparable, however, the rewards on offer are only a fraction of that available on the EPGA tour. Golfer F, who plays on Challenge tour, explained how much a typical season would cost:

It’s hard for me to talk about golf without talking about money. It has to have an impact. If you look at how much it costs to play 20 events on Challenge tour I reckon that’s a conservative, on your own, and sharing your room, with no single rooms, a conservative £30,000 to play Challenge tour. That’s the cheapest you could do it – although you could always be cheaper if you stay in your car! ... If you need a £15,000 salary to survive, which you can get flipping burgers at

McDonald's, then you need to earn £45,000 to break even. But you get taxed at source on anything up to 20%, or 40% in some countries. You now need to earn £60,000 to get the money you need to survive. And that's not a holiday, it's barely a haircut.

To put this in context, players earning £60,000 or more at the end of the 2012 Challenge tour season had to finish in the top 15 on the rankings list. There were 220 players on the order of merit and around 400 members in total (EPGA, 2012c). Given the top-down nature of prize breakdown in professional golf players must finish top 25 to make a return on their investments. Golfer D, who has experience playing a cross section of tours below EPGA tour, when asked about the Challenge tour said:

Unless you're winning or in the top five or perhaps top 10 every week you're not really making a huge amount of money. Almost definitely there are some people which it has cost them money. I would say that more than half the players who are playing, it has cost them money.

This quote highlights that the differential economic power relations are characterized by players' relative positions on tour. Golfer D goes as far as to say that for some players, plying their trade on the golf tour has put them in a position whereby they have a lesser degree of financial power given that playing has cost them significant sums of money. Furthermore, it could be argued that given the initial expense required to pursue a career in professional sport and particularly, although not exclusively, those sports which require increased levels of travel such as tennis and athletics, if players are outside the top echelons then it may in fact cost them significant amounts of money.

The third tier of professional golf based in the UK and Ireland is the EuroPro tour. EuroPro tour events last three rounds in total, not four, but also have a cut after round two. Prize money is awarded exponentially to players who make the cut and is more top-heavy than both EPGA and Challenge tours meaning that the power relations between EuroPro tour players are contoured by a different set of economic constraints. For example, players on the EuroPro tour can make the cut and still not earn enough prize money to cover their tournament entry fee alone. As Golfer B, who is currently playing on the EuroPro tour, explained:

The money is very top-heavy. This year I've played five events and made the cut in all of them ... There is nothing for consistency really. You've got to get in there and contend. If we are paying £275 to enter we should at least get that back if you make the cut. But you don't, you've got to finish thirtieth or thirty-fifth to get that back. Which I think is a bit unfair because guys can go broke pretty quickly by playing decent and making cuts. A lot of guys have had to quit and start working [in a job outside of golf] because they couldn't afford it.

Similarly, Golfer G, who has experience of Challenge and EuroPro tour candidly stated "the level which I am at you are always scraping the barrel". As the EuroPro tour is based in the UK and Ireland it means travel expenses for the participants are significantly less than if they were competing on the Challenge tour, however, prize funds are also

commensurately lower. The EuroPro tour order of merit winner at the end of the 2012 season earned £32,000 with typical expenses for playing a full schedule of events in the region of £10,000 (EuroPro, 2012). It seems that those responsible for running the EuroPro tour consider a top-heavy first prize as being important in order to secure television coverage, and the associated sponsorship this generates. An unintended consequence of this approach is that it favours a style of golf which deviates from that seemingly required on EPGA tour. As we explained above, consistency of play and making “the cut” is considered a key part of EPGA tour golfers’ workplace experiences, however, EuroPro tour interviewees argued winning one or two events and missing cuts for the remainder of the season was a better approach than consistently making cuts all season. The general consensus is that EuroPro tour players opted for an “aggressive” approach, as Golfer B says “you’ve got to go for it”. Given one of the aims of the EuroPro tour is to equip players for higher tours it would appear this approach is not conducive to preparation for the higher tier and thus the approaches to their working life as a professional golfer must change depending on the level of tour. This example neatly highlights the complexity of the golfing figuration and the failure of any party to have direct control in regards to the overall outcome. In other words, the prize money breakdown on the EuroPro tour – despite the intention that it is a developmental tour that aims to provide a route to higher level tours – actually fosters a style of play which differs from that required on the higher tours to which the players are supposedly being prepared. We now turn to address the habitus of professional golfers in more detail.

A Golfer's Habitus: Gambling on the Big Break

Through the network of relationships individuals find themselves inevitably involved in, they develop, subconsciously and consciously, internalized constraints relating to behaviour. This is referred to as an individual's 'habitus' and such a concept proves useful to examine how golfers make sense of their workplace experiences in relation to the economic pressures, decisions, and constraints outlined earlier in this paper. For example, many golfers exhibited what some interviewees specifically referred to as a gambling attitude. As Player F stated:

I think professional golfers need a certain gambling mentality because it's effectively what you're doing. You're risking your expenses for the week on your golf game. And if you're prepared to deal with that, and the consequences of that, then you'll be better off. If you're a "fly by the seats of your pants" type person, it helps. If you're a safe planner, I think you might struggle.

Players on the EPGA tour are potentially competing for significant amounts of money each week when compared to the less prestigious tours. However, players on the Challenge tour, for example, are often constrained to outlay money to play in events worldwide in the hope that they will earn enough to sustain themselves on tour. Golfer G, who has experience of Challenge and EuroPro tour, explained: "At my level you are gambling a little bit with your game. You're paying money to go out to wherever, places like Dubai or America, on the chance you're going to earn more money back". Many of the players within this study, it seems, found themselves in something of a double bind.

That is, on the one hand some of the participants considered that there is a need to try and be as structured as possible, because this helped with their overall costs when trying to plan tournaments to enter, but on the other hand there was a feeling amongst most of the participants in this study that some golfers needed to be prepared to gamble as their 'big breakthrough' might be just around the corner, or moments away. As such, players were willing to gamble by paying out to cover their expenses in the hope that they will play well enough to earn more money back. No single player has full control of the outcome of the golf tournament, even despite such lengths of planning, and this is another dimension of the golfers' working lives that was largely outside their control.

In the same way there is an addictive element to gambling in general (Aasvad, 2003; Cosgrave, 2010; Dunning & Waddington, 2003), there appears to be an addictive element to playing golf on tour. For example, a player can spend large sums of money playing in events worldwide but they still have the opportunity to earn even larger sums back if they have a high finish in just one event. Given the top-heavy nature of the prize breakdown a win would likely cover all expenses and leave a significant amount of profit – as such, it proved an enticing scenario for the players within this study to keep returning despite evident worries about money. Alternatively, consistently missing cuts leads to even more expense building up. The typical habitus of interviewees from this study was contoured by the belief that a win will come soon and this made it difficult for players to disengage from the professional game and target events on a tour where they have little chance of achieving a return on their financial outlay. The golfer's habitus has developed from their own experiences, deeply rooted attachments, motivations and

aspirations from wanting to be a professional golfer. In other words, for many professional golfers, they are so deeply bound up within what might be termed the golf figuration, because being on tour so regularly keeps them away from day-to-day contact with people outside this golf figuration, that players are surrounded by other people so equally involved they cannot shake the often unrealistic notion that their “big break” will happen soon. As such, even despite the evidence they see on a daily basis of their own financial and personal struggles, and those of most of their fellow pros, many professional golfers inevitably struggle to view their social world in a more object-adequate, more detached way (Elias, 1987). Similarly, golfers interviewed for this study cited the typical family pressures which contributed to pursuing life on tour, which directly relate to their ‘gambling mentality’ habitus. As Golfer F explained:

The better you are the easier it is ... you can justify why you’re doing it because you’ve bought the house ... you can provide for the family... If you’ve played well enough to buy the house then you provide stability for your family... if you have a bad patch and you start to get some grief [from your partner] you can say “the good times were alright we’ve bought a house”.

The golfers’ habitus is further encouraged by the media who focus almost solely on the financial rewards achieved by elite level sportspeople at the top of their relative sport and the potential longevity of a career in professional golf (Farahmand, Broman, de Faire, & Ahlbom, 2009; Versteegh, Vandervoort, Landsay, & Lynn, 2008).

Given the difficult financial situation in which players often find themselves, it might be considered surprising to find that players interviewed for this study emphasized what they perceived as the value of staying in professional golf given the rewards that are possible should they succeed in the future. Further contributing to the gambling inherent to the golfing habitus, the golfers taking part in this study generally considered that golf was their most likely route to financial security – despite the recognition that it was also very difficult to achieve this. As Golfer B clearly stated:

On the main tour people are made, you see these guys and it's unbelievable. The rewards which are out there are massive but on these mini-tours you're broke really. So now money wise for me it's get whatever cash you can to scrape through, and sometimes you're on real fine margins but it's got to be done ... You have got to give yourself the chance, I know I'm good enough. There are a few players at this club [referring to the club where the player has an attachment to] which wish they would have give [sic] it a few years because now they regret it ... Who knows what could have happened?

In other words, even despite the overwhelming odds against making a living through professional tournament golf, while the players within this study were still playing they believed they had the opportunity to one day compete at the highest levels and enjoy the rewards that this would bring. Virtually all interviewees believed they had more to give in the game and would one day compete at the highest levels. As Golfer F explained:

I've been through financial ruin as a result of my commitment to continuing to play. And how I was, and still am, unwilling to give up my dream. And it's cost

me my marriage as well. So, that's the price that I've paid to continue playing golf. But, when I was 10 years old at school I was looking out of the window daydreaming about having an opportunity to play ... I'm not prepared to give up on it yet. I wouldn't change it for anything, I really wouldn't. It's upsetting that it led to, in fact drastically led to, the breakdown of my marriage... But, would I do it all again? Yes! I'd always planned to be a golfer or die in the process.

Interviewees enthusiastically championed professional golf as a career route even despite the difficulties involved and the fact that only a small percentage would succeed in making a living out of the game. If these comments are evaluated from a figurational standpoint it is clear that these attitudes stem from their habitus, that is their deeply rooted attachments motivations and aspirations, which lead to internalized constraints from wanting to be a professional golfer. While away on tour interviewees surround themselves on a daily basis with people who share the same hopes and dreams and thus find it difficult to view their social world in a more detached and reality congruent way. The extensive amount of media focus on the glamour and money associated with top level elite sport encourages and strengthens the golfer's habitus and reduces players' ability to make sense of their social world in a more detached way. Virtually all participants commented that they aspired to be professional golfers from a very young age and many knew nothing different. Furthermore, despite the vicissitudes of a career on tour, all were willingly continuing to aspire to dream that their game would come good, either again, or for the first time, and this would 'make them'.

The Enabling and Constraining Roles of a Sponsor

Given the financial outlay to play on tour, finding a sponsor can have a significant impact. Some sponsors provide funds or other kinds of support (such as travel services) to players and in return usually require endorsement of their particular products or services, this may include, for example, playing with a particular brand of golf clubs or individuals putting their name to golf tourism destinations. Other players were, in effect, ‘sponsored’ by friends and family prepared to back them financially in order that they can pursue their life on tour. Sponsorship deals, therefore, are by their very nature complex, varied, and constantly in flux. However, there was overwhelming agreement from the participants in this study that in the first instance a sponsor can relieve some of the financial pressures of playing professional golf. As Golfer N stated, “a sponsor gave you a start in the year financially”. At the same time, players identified numerous differential pressures and potential problems of working with a complex network of sponsors. There was a strong feeling among interviewees that their work in golf was becoming driven increasingly by the need to source a network of sponsors in order to secure funding. For some players they would simply not be able to play without a sponsor. The player-sponsor relationship should be viewed as a process with a variety of levels right from no sponsorship to potentially large sums and this balance changes over time. For example, at first players strived for enough sponsorship to cover the expense of travel so any prize money earned beyond this went directly to the player themselves. A former EPGA tour winner, Golfer C, identified the key role of a sponsor: “at the time when I started I had a good sponsor so I could play virtually anywhere. The sponsor made it very different and

took the pressure off”. Similarly, Golfer E, an EPGA main tour player and former Challenge tour winner stated:

A sponsor is a very important and integral part of having a life on tour. I was lucky that I did well in tournaments in my early days and my name got recognized and I picked up a sponsor. This helped relieve some of the pressure. Although I did not rely solely on the money from the sponsor and put some of it away I would always have enough money to play for a year should the sponsor pull out. I used to win money and put it away and not totally rely on a sponsor, but it was certainly a cushion. Some may find it difficult as it’s becoming increasingly hard to find a sponsor in tough economic times.

Relationships with sponsors might be viewed as both enabling and constraining. Sponsors enable players to travel and compete in golf tournaments, however, often they require significant commitments in return. In this dynamic power relationship the higher ranked players often have the most lenient sponsorship deals while the lower players are more constrained to adhere to often stricter contractual arrangements. Over time this power dynamic is not static and rather ebbs and flows and this further reinforces the need to appreciate that professional golfers cannot be seen as a homogenous group or viewed statically. There is a clear process whereby all professional golfers are required increasingly to work within more complex and lengthening networks of relationships that incorporate a range of different sponsors, reflecting the growing complexity of these networks, and particularly the increasing demands of sponsors for players to fulfil their contractual obligations. For some in our sample there is evidence of a commodification of

players who had sold shares in themselves where the investors would receive a return of profits at the end of the season as in the form of a dividend. For example, Golfer P explained a share system which he offered to:

Members at the club, people I just know from along the way, friends, family, and if they want a share they have bought into me ... they receive a dividend ... a typical share is £300 for one year and twenty per cent of all prize money goes back into the pot and is split between [the shareholders] ... say I've sold 50 shares and somebody has got one they would get one fiftieth of the total prize money.

However, this commodification of golf players should not to be viewed as a relationship in which the golfer is controlled by the investors but rather results from this study suggest a two-way process in which the player is enabled to compete on tour given the funds raised and the investors received a split of the prize money. Given the top-heavy nature of prize breakdown in professional golf, which is covered extensively in this paper, potential returns on such an investment are, for the majority of players, relatively small sums of money. As Golfer P explained, "last year they [the investors] got their money back but no more" and added that in practice investors "don't really take their dividend because they're not in it for the money". It would appear that the network of family and friends involved in this type of investment, in contrast to the more commercial sponsorship deals, are motivated not by financial gain but rather in support of the player.

Given that all golfers require clubs to play the game an equipment sponsor in particular was considered potentially important. The golfer-sponsor relationship changes

over time and stages of the golfers' career. For example, given their greater degree of power in the golf hierarchy, top ranked EPGA players have a greater level of choice regarding equipment and often get paid very large sums of money to use it. However, lower down the golf hierarchy a player has a more complex relationship with their sponsor. Golfer B specifically referred to playing on Challenge tour as a "make or break moment ... because if you're on challenge tour and you don't 'make it' you will start losing money" adding that "the only bonus is if you have a decent card you can get some sponsorship. Whereas on the EuroPro it's so tough, if you ask for sponsorship they say "well I can give it to people on [main or Challenge] tour really"". Similarly, Golfer F said that on "EuroPro [tour] there are few people that would offer you sponsorship", however, continued to add that over time if moving through the higher tiers players begin to attract more sponsorship opportunities. More specifically, Golfer F explained that when moving towards the higher tiers:

Guys are getting stuff thrown at them. How hard is it to not change your driver when you've got the latest and greatest for free and paid to use it sometimes? How hard is it to say no? [A fellow tour player] said last week he'd just changed back to his old putter. Nike were paying him a modest amount, they were paying him \$700 dollars a week to play a Nike putter. He said "how can I turn that down?" But he realized that after a few missed cuts that \$700 was a drop in the ocean compared to the putts he would hole with his old putter that will earn him five times that amount in the year if he plays well with it.

This neatly highlights both the constraining and enabling elements of the relationship between golfers and sponsors. An equipment sponsor can enable a player to pursue life on tour by contributing towards associated expenses while, at the same time, constraining players to play a particular brand and type of club that may not necessarily be the equipment they would otherwise choose for themselves. Equipment sponsors stipulate that players are required to use a set number, or in some cases, all, of the said brand. However, the reality is that very few players would choose to use a full set of the same brand of club at any one time and would prefer the freedom to change certain clubs from one brand to another. Furthermore, some equipment manufacturers offer substantially more financial recompense than others but with tighter contractual arrangements. The result is players often find themselves in a position whereby they are constrained to make a decision between receiving regular money through equipment sponsorship and the impact this may have on their performances when using the same brand of clubs. In this respect, Golfer F again highlighted how despite the fact that it might be difficult for most players to turn down the money offered:

it's a bit of a false economy if it's not the right stuff for you ... the touring fraternity earn the majority of their income with the tools of the trade. They're never going to get paid enough to justify missing putts with a putter they get paid to use as opposed to holing putts with a putter they use for free. They are never going to pay you enough to warrant that. And there's a knock on effect of losing your card and the confidence and everything else. When starting out on tour don't change anything but your underpants!

Similarly, an EPGA main tour player, Golfer E, highlighted that equipment manufacturers can be “a help and hindrance at the same time” because players can find themselves being able to use the latest equipment for ‘free’ as soon as it comes out, but this may not actually be a good thing. As Golfer E continued, players could end up “using a club with the latest shaft in but then miss the cut and think why did I bother changing around with everything as now its cost me money!” Furthermore, some players are contractually required to use the latest equipment from their brand sponsor. Given the frequent introduction of new golf equipment professional golfers are regularly required to contend with issues which arise from such changes in the golfer-sponsor relationship.

In summary, the figurations in which players and equipment sponsors are enmeshed can be seen to have both constraining and enabling elements. They can enable a player to pursue life on tour by contributing towards associated expenses while, at the same time, constraining players to play a particular brand and type of club that may not necessarily be the equipment they would choose given a free-hand. The very complexity and dynamic nature of the player-sponsor relations, particularly over time, such as introduction of new golf equipment from sponsors, gives rise to outcomes that nobody has chosen and nobody has designed. It is the growing complexity of the networks golf professionals are part of which may, in fact, have the unintended outcome of undermining a player’s success on tour as they are set with the question of whether to use a particular brand of equipment or not.

Conclusion

The central objective of this paper has been to examine how money has impacted on the development of relationships in the working lives of male professional golfers across the three tiers of the EPGA tour. It is argued that golfers in the higher echelons of the professional game are receiving more money than ever before, both in terms of prize money and available endorsements. This group is often focussed on by the media, however a more detached, figurational analysis shows that such rewards are available to relatively small numbers of people and the vast majority fare comparatively poorly. As Golfer M stated, it seems for many that professional golf is actually “a loss making business”. It also appears this divide is widening and prize money between the higher and lower golf tours is becoming increasingly polarized. Given the millionaire stereotype often associated with professional golf, and elite-level sport more generally, it is unsurprising that increasing numbers of people aspire to play professionally. A more reality congruent view, however, reveals that only a very small number of players are able to make a very comfortable living from playing golf and even the majority of players who make it to the level of playing ‘on tour’ will face financial difficulties in pursuing their goals. It is argued that given the initial expense required to pursue a career in professional sport and particularly, although not exclusively, those sports which require increased levels of travel such as tennis and athletics, if players are outside the top echelons then it may in fact cost them significant amounts of money. Furthermore, it is argued that those who are required to make significant investments in their future, particularly if that is to fulfil their childhood dreams, that this may blur their thinking in regard to seeing the reality of their situation, particularly where money is involved.

This paper has also sought to explain the ways and extent to which issues of money shape the lives of the majority of golf professionals and the increasingly complex networks of relationships which accompany this. A closer examination of the figurations players are a part of, and the characteristics of these dynamic power relationships, has indicated that while the costs of playing on an increasingly global tour schedule have constrained players to develop networks with sponsors for financial reasons they have also, at the same time, in some cases, made it more difficult for players to achieve their goal of playing better golf. The golfers in this study playing most of their golf below the EPGA tour level were faced with an often conflicting choice between regular money from equipment sponsors, and adhering to restrictive contractual agreements which accompany them, or the freedom to choose and play with a variety of different brand clubs. The associated impacts on a player's game is neither intended nor desired by the sponsors themselves and indicative of unplanned outcomes which are the result of the inability of any one group to retain control over the golfing figuration. Such unplanned outcomes are not unusual aspects of social interaction generally, but rather the result of complex processes involving the interweaving of actions of large numbers of people, such as sponsors, who frequently pursue their own interests, which, may or may not coincide with the interests of the person themselves.

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Notes

¹ Professional tournament golf in Europe is organized into three main tiers (see figure 1). The highest tier is the EPGA tour, the second tier is the Challenge tour, and the EPGA endorse four third tier tours, namely: the EuroPro tour (UK and Ireland), the European Professional Development (EPD) tour (Austria, Egypt, Germany, Morocco, Poland, and Turkey), the Alps tour (Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland) and the Nordic league (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden).

²The maximum field size reduces dependent upon time of year and amount of daylight and can be as low as 132.

³All figures in the examples that are presented here have been adjusted in line with inflation data to 2012.

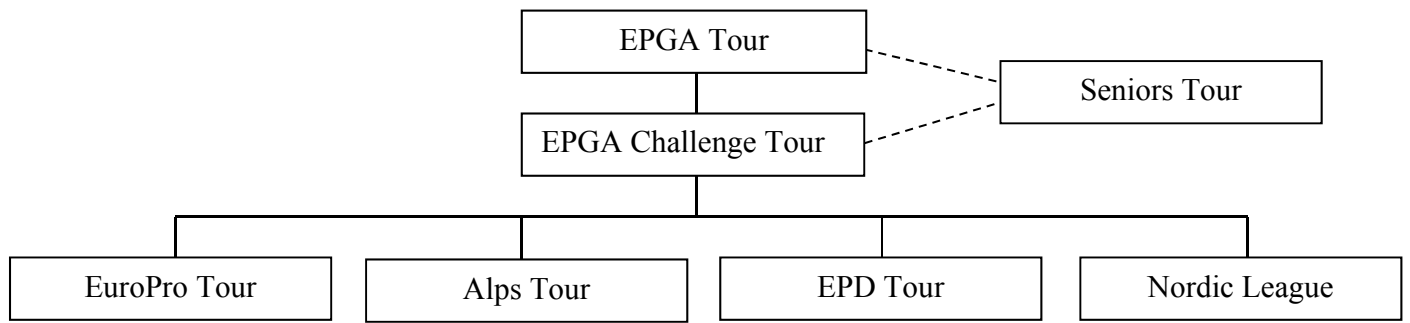


Figure 1. Figuration of European golf tours.

Table 1: *Participant characteristics*

Participant	Trajectory to tour
Golfer A	Played on EPGA tour for a period spanning 20 years in total. For 16 of those years had full playing rights and won one event. In the intervening four years had full playing rights on Challenge tour and won one event.
Golfer B	Played four years with full playing rights on Challenge tour followed by four years with full playing rights on EuroPro tour. Has also played some EPGA tour events.
Golfer C	Played on EPGA tour for a period spanning 21 years in total. For 18 of those years had full playing rights and won one event. Following this played on Seniors tour for six years. Has also played some Challenge tour events.
Golfer D	Played some events on EPGA tour spanning three years before earning full playing rights on Seniors tour for the following three years. Has also played some Challenge tour and EuroPro tour events.
Golfer E	Played on EPGA tour for a period spanning 11 years in total. For nine of those years had full playing rights. Has also played some Challenge tour events and had one win.
Golfer F	Played on Challenge tour for a period spanning nine years in total. For three of those years had full playing rights and for the other six years played on EuroPro tour.
Golfer G	Played on Challenge tour for a period spanning four years. For two of those years had full playing rights and for the other two played on EuroPro tour and had two wins.
Golfer H	Had full playing rights on EPGA tour for a period of 13 years.
Golfer I	Played one year on EuroPro tour followed by one year on EPD tour.
Golfer J	Had full playing rights on EPGA tour for five years. Has also played some Challenge tour events.
Golfer K	Played on EPGA tour for a period spanning 12 years in total. For eight of those years had full playing rights and for the remaining four played on Challenge tour.
Golfer L	Played for four years on EuroPro tour followed by one year on Challenge tour.
Golfer M	Played for two years on EPD tour.
Golfer N	Played on EPGA tour for a period of 19 years in total. For 11 of those years had full playing rights and won one event.
Golfer O	Played for five years on EPGA tour and won one event.

Golfer P	Played on Challenge Tour for one year and some local events.
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